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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intellectual and subjective subscription of philosophy of education students to four philosophies of education and whether the strength of subscription changes as a result of exposure to an appropriate level course in which these philosophies are discussed. Sixty-three graduate and 63 undergraduate students were pre- and posttested using the "What Is Your Philosophy of Education" test. Validity and reliability for this instrument have not been established. Data was gathered and responses were noted for each of the four philosophical views: idealist, realist, pragmatist, and Aristotelian. For the total statistical analysis, the number of students subscribing to each philosophy was artifically obtained. Results indicated that Pragmatism exerts the major philosophical influence on students of education on the graduate and undergraduate levels. Further findings, recommendations, and implications are suggested. A four item bibliography is included. (MJM)

(168)

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PRAGMATISM PROFESSED; REALISM REJECTED : A RESEARCH STUDY OF PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

by

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Need and Purposes for the Study

Too often, too many teachers, principals, yea, even professors of education and their deans have minimized the need and the importance of the Educational Foundations courses in general, and Philosophy of Education in particular. However, this researcher , a professor of Educational Foundations and Research, deems it vital for all educational practitioners to have a philosophical framework upon which to base their practices. There must be a rationale, a gestalt, a carefully thought-out and thought-through sense of purpose in professional practices. Otherwise, the practices degenerate into a shooting from the hip in all directions with dum-dum bullets, as it were. That is to say, the practices though deep are directionless and scattered.

Thus the purposes of this study can be summarized in these terms:

1) To investigate the intellectual and subjective subscription of Philosophy of Education Students to four philosophies of education.
2) To investigate whether the strength of subscription to these various philosophies changes as the result of exposure to an appropriate level course in which

these philosophies and their roles in the current educational scene are examined and discussed.

Statement of the Problem

Since 1968, this researcher has taught a graduate course in Philosophy of Education (Ed. 503), and since 1970 an undergraduate course in Development of Educational Thought (Ed.445). It was never his intention to proselytize his students, to convert them to his way of thinking. Rather, much to the contrary, he has felt that for the courses to have any efficacy, they must involve a scraping of the innards. He was not seeking disciples. He was seeking a way to expose the students to the differences in the variegated views of philosophies as applied to the educational enterprise. For years, the students had answered the questions. Now it was time for them to question the answers. Thus it was that although the writer is an eclectic (who really isn't?) with a heavy pragmatic strain, he sought to operate each course with a discussion of The Six Philosophical Questions, The Four Crucial Questions, and The Four Premises.

The Six Philosophical Questions

What is man's origin?

What is man's nature?

What is man's destiny?

What is good?

What is true (real)?

What is beautiful?

Who can deny that the scraping of our innards by these fundamental questions must lead to an educational position, a human view, a re-evaluation of what it is that we fundamentally believe as educational practitioners?

The Four Crucial Questions

Who are my students?

What shall they be taught? How? Why?

For what purpose?

And by whom?

It is this researcher's view that much of the problem in education stems from the obvious fact that teachers do not typically view the natures, the abilities, and the capacities of their students first. They think in terms of subject matter first, and then it is without thinking of organically related methodology. Further, what is the justification? What is the purpose of teaching/learning a particular discipline and what kind of teacher is needed? These questions are crucial, indeed !

The Four Premises

Each course, too, was based on The Four Premises:

1) That there is no perfectly developed or absolutely closed , static philosophy of education.

2) That philosophy is more important, more practical than the so-called practical.

3) That philosophies change as each person changes and grows.

4) That professional practices to be truly professional must be based on philosophical underpinnings. (But the practices as well as the philosophies can not/ should not be pigeon-holed.)

Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated long before this particular study or any formal research was envisioned , and were based largely on the assumption that Pragmatism has been the major philosophical influence on American education in the twentieth century:

1) A heavy preponderance of student responses are and will continue to be pragmatic.

2) There is no significant difference between student responses on the pre and post-tests re What Is Your Philospphy of Education?

3) There is no significant difference between the graduate responses and the undergraduate responses on the test.

4) There is no change in the proportion of students subscribing to a particular educational philosophy.

Definitions

1) Aristotelian - Aristotle was concerned with the concept of the golden means and moderation. To him, education meant the development of the well-rounded individual in whom reasoning and speculation were paramount. He laid the foundation for the classical tradition in education.

2) Pragmatist - Although the pragmatists differ in method and conclusions, they are bound by certain threads of commonality: the reality of change; the social and biological nature of man; the relativity of values; the the use of critical intelligence, i.e., the scientific method, for the solution of human problems.

3) Idealist - The Idealist believes that man must develop a harmony between man and the Ultimate Reality and that this reality is spiritual, not physical; it is mental, not material. Values are primarily eternal and absolute, not relative.

4) Realist - The realist says that there are "reals" in this ordered universe such as stars and long division, and that these reals exist independently of the human mind. They are real whether we perceive them or not.

Limitations

1) The instrument was a test , What Is Your Philosophy of Education? whose author is unknown , and whose validity and reliability have not been established.

2) The instrument is marred by some ambiguity and contains nothing regarding Naturalism and Existentialism, two significant philosophical forces.

3) A total of 63 graduate students and a total of 63 undergraduate students , all under the tutelage of the same professor, made a grand total of 2940 responses.

4) Six graduate classes were pre and post-tested between February 1969 and May 1972.

5) Two undergraduate classes were pre and post-tested between September 1970 and December 1971.

6) For the post-test, the students , now test-wise and conversant with the salient features of each philosophy, were able to dictate the patterns of responses instead of reacting spontaneously as they did in the pre-test.

7) There was no matching of students between pre and post measurements to preserve anonymity. Thus the students were not random but were intact groups. External validity , given the quasi-experimental nature of the study, was greatly limited.

Procedures

Types of Research

This study was conclusion-oriented research inasmuch as the researcher desired to add to the intellectual capital of the educational foundations. It was decision-oriented inasmuch as the findings and conclusions yielded new found knowledge from which changes in the courses could be implemented and/or viable teaching methods and foci already employed would be substantiated.

Data Gathering

Table I reflects the pattern for the pre and post -testing from Febraury 1969 through to May 1972. The responses are noted for each philosophical view: Idealist Realist; Pragmatist; and Aristotelian.

TABLE I

Pre and Post- Test Responses

	Date	Idealist	Realist	Pragmatist	Aristotelian	Total
1	Pre Test 2/3/69	12	4	37	19	72
	Post Test 5/29/69	11	2	47	12	72
2	Pre Test 7/1/69	24	11	48	37	120
	Post Test 8/5/69	26	14	58	22	120
3	Pre Test 2/9/70	14	7	50	13	84
	Post Test 5/10/70	19	3	40	10	72
4	Pre Test 6/30/70	24	16	37	19	96
	Post Test 8/4/70	19	9	56	12	96
5	Pre Test 2/3/71	61	23	94	50	228
	Post Test 5/12/71	45	21	89	37	192
6	Pre Test 2/9/72	36	14	73	33	156
	Post Test 5/10/72	25	5	85	17	132
	GRAND TOTALS	316	129	714	281	1440
1	Pre Test 9/21/70	108	25	206	57	396
	Post Test 12/7/70 U.D.	86	16	239	55	396
2	Pre Test 9/16/71	90	22	186	62	360
	Post Test 12/2/71 U.D.	66	7	229	46	348
	GRAND TOTALS	350	70	860	220	1500
	GRAND, GRAND TOTALS	666	199	1574	501	2940

The Instrument

The instrument, What Is Your Philosophy of Education?, is an attitude test consisting of twelve multiple-choice questions, each with four responses. Each of the responses is related to the epistemological, metaphysical, axiological , etc. concerns of the four philosophies. The written directions which preface the instrument are stated below:

> This attitude test has been designed to enable you to determine for yourself which of the four main types of philosophy best characterizes your own educational thinking. Read carefully each of the four numbered statements grouped under the letter A, and then check the one of the four which most nearly coincides with your own opinion. Then procedd to the four statements grouped under the letter B, then to C, and on always checking the one of each group which most nearly expresses your own view.

The first question, designated A, is reproduced below. In this test item, as in the remaining 11, the respondent checks the answer that most nearly reflects his philosophical view. There are no right or wrong answers.

A.

1. ( ) We should use experience as a guide to action and to theories governing human problems in general. We are essentially biosocial organisms, responding to biological and social stimulations and trying to solve the problems set up by our environment.

2. ( ) All men are born with the same set of powers, however limited in degree, or however much held in abeyance by pathological conditions, such powers may be. The aim of education should be the same for all men in every mode of society at all times.

3. ( ) The self is primary and "things" are secondary. Mind and self, rather than things of matter, are the essential factors in experience, and furnish the standards and ideals which give to experience its structure and aims.

4. ( ) The external world of physical reality is the most fundamental thing in experience. It is objective and factual, something I have to accept and conform to, whether I want to, or not. What I want or feel is merely subjective and secondary.

/Note the meanings of the responses: 1- Pragmatist; 2- Aristotelian; 3-Idealist; 4-Realist. _/

A random selection of responses by graduate students to question A is reflected in Table II.

TABLE II

Selected Response Patterns

		PRAGMATIST		ARISTOTELIAN		IDEALISTIC		REALISTIC	
Date	N	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
2-3-71	19	15	14	1	0	3	2	0	0
5-5-71	16								
2-9-72	13	8	10	0	0	5	1	0	0
5-10-72	11								

The other data on the individual test items seem to bear out the pattern shown in Table II.

Data Treatment

For the total statisical analysis , the number of students subscribing to each philosophy was obtained artificially by dividing 12 into the number of responses in each category and rounding. And although there were 63 graduate

students in the four-year academic period, 1968-1972, and 63 undergraduate students in the two-year academic period, 1970-1971 , for Statistical Tables III, IV, and V , the graduate students equal 57 and the undergraduate students equal 62. Too , the test numbers of responses were adjusted when post-test students were absent.

The broad methodology included a rational inspection ofpercentages of students in each philosophical category. The Chi-square statistic was used to evaluate the significance of changes in all proportions of students assigned to each philosophical category. [1]

1. The author is indebted to Dr. Norman Wexler, Research Associate at the Educational Testing Service , Princeton, N.J. for the statistical analyses and Tables III, IV, and V.

Presentation and Analysis of the Findings

TABLE III

Number of Graduate Students Subscribing to Certain Educational Philosophies (N = 57)

	I	R	P	A	T
Pre[a]	13 (23)[b]	6 (10)	25 (44)	13 (23)	57 (100)
Post	12 (21)	5 (9)	31 (54)	9 (16)	57 (100)

Chi-square = 2.9 df = 3 not significant

TABLE IV

Number of Undergraduate Students Subscribing to Certain Educational Philosophies

	I	R	P	A	T
Pre[a]	16 (26)	4 (6)	32 (52)	10 (16)	62 (100)
Post	13 (21)	2 (3)	39 (63)	8 (13)	62 (100)

Chi-square = 3.5 df = 3 not significant

TABLE V

Comparison of Graduate and Undergraduate Numbers of Students Subscribing to Certain Educational Philosophies

[redacted]	I	R	P	A	T
Graduate[c]	12 (21)	5 (9)	29 (51)	11 (19)	57 (100)
Undergrad[c]	14 (23)	3 (5)	36 (58)	9 (14)	62 (100)
Total	26 (22)	8 (6)	65 (55)	20(17)	119 (100)

Chi-Square = 1.4 df = 3 not significant

a Pre test results were used as theoretical frequencies against which post test results were compared. The null hypothesis is that there is no change in the proportion of students subscribing to particular educational philosophies.

b Number in parenthesis is the percent. Some adjustment made so that they add to 100.

c The number of Graduate and Undergraduate students is an artificial compendium of pre and post total number of responses to each philos.category. The number of students is obtained by dividing the number of responses by 24 and rounding.

for

As a summary of findings, it may be stated the total student sample -- graduate and undergraduate - that

1) 55% of the students subscribed to the Pragmatic philosophy.

2) 22% of the students subscribed to the Idealistic philosophy.

3) 17% of the students subscribed to the Aristotelian philosophy.

4) Only 6% of the students subscribed to the Realistic philosophy.

5) Thus more than half of the students subscribed to Pragmatism, and less than half subscribed to Idealism, Aristotelianism, and Realism combined.

Conclusions

1) Hypothesis # 1 -- a heavy preponderance of student responses are and will continue to be pragmatic -- was supported.

2) Hypothesis #2 --there is no significant difference between student responses on the pre- and post-test -- was supported.

3) Hypothesis #3 -- there is no significant difference between the graduate responses and the undergraduate responses --was supported.

4) Hypothesis #4 --there is no change in the proportion of students subscribing to a particular educational philosophy -- was supported.

Therefore, it was concluded that Pragmatism exerts the major philosophical influence on students of education -- graduate and undergraduate.

Recommendations and Implications

1) Whether the results of this study are because of (or in spite of) the professor, the te xt(s) , discussions, etc. will never be known for certainty.

2) Ed. 445 and Ed. 503 (with one exception) both begin with discussions of Pragmatism.

3) Two texts begin with readings in Pragmatism and related philosophies, and the third text was used , beginning with Pragmatism. The fourth text discussed Pragmatism fourth.

4) More class time in both courses, graduate and undergraduate , was spent on Pragmatism.

5) The preponderance of pragamtists is consonant with the actual case in America. Our schools, especially the public schools, are largely under the influence of Pragmatism.

6). It is obvious, too, that although 1574/2940 responses were pragmatic, other schools were also represented. That is to say, that no one person subscribes to any one philosophy in its entirety to the exclusion of all other philosophical concepts. (There was one exception: a student who was completely pragamtic pre and post.)

7). The least subscribed to philosophy seems to be realism because of its implications of objective data being transmitted to computer-like students.

8) However, there seems to be a dichotomy between "lip service" given to Pragmatism and the very actual practice of realism in the typical classroom of America.

Apparently, students enter college for pre-service and/or in-service teacher-education with relatively fixed ideas about what education ought to be. And these ideas are not too amenable to change according to the present data. But this does not in any way diminish the efficacy of the courses in Philosophy of Education if one views these courses as viable vehicles of intellectual challenge and philosophical exposure instead of a means for philosophical conversion.

But there is an element of disturbance. The findings may be indicative of the fact that in our diversely pluralistic culture we have difficulty in finding a consensus of purpose and method within the bounds of formal education.

> It seems a paradox that in a world which has seen a man put on the moon, which has seen the heart transplanted, that we have not yet had the courage and the foresight to separate the nonsense from the wisdom in our educational process. 2.

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2. John Mathias, Graduate Student, Rider College, Summer 1972.